

Information Brief

Positive Behavioral Supports

Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) is a relatively new and growing field of applied behavioral science. PBS focuses on the healthy social and behavioral development of children and youth through a “systemic approach to enhancing the capacity of schools to adopt and sustain the effective use of practices” for all students (Sugai, February 1999). It provides both a process of problem solving and planning and a set of empirically validated behavior change strategies designed to address the behavioral challenges of children and youth as schools, families, and communities strive to prepare them for a dramatically changing world.

INTRODUCTION

Children and youth need to acquire the skills necessary for successful adulthood in today’s society. Most will have the supports from their families, peers, schools, and communities. Yet, others lack these supports. In fact, there is an increasing number of young people who are at risk of displaying antisocial and disruptive, even violent, behavior that is causing concern to schools. They come to school lacking a repertoire of pro-social skills. The lack of pro-social engagement in the community and the resulting association with a network of antisocial peers are shown to be strong correlates to additional problematic and deviant behavior (Biglan, 1993, 1995).

Researchers have found that the typical “get tougher” response to problem behavior in the form of increased punishment is essentially ineffective in changing these behaviors. In fact, they found punishment that is not in the context of a positive school-wide disciplinary system is associated with increased aggression, vandalism, truancy, tardiness, and dropouts. On the other hand, a prevention and early intervention system of positive behavioral supports holds promise for reducing serious behavior challenges (Lewis and Sugai, 1999).

“If schools are to be safe, effective environments, behavior support must become a proactive priority, not simply a concern to be addressed after disruptive behavior engulfs a community.”

- Horner and Sugai

POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT – WHAT IS IT?

Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) is defined as: “a broad range of systemic and individualized strategies for achieving important social and learning outcomes while preventing problem behavior. PBS is the integration of (a) valued outcomes, (b) science of human behavior, (c) validated procedures, and (d) systems change” (OSEP).

A system of positive behavior supports is a comprehensive set of strategies that includes social skill training, academic and curricular restructuring, proactive management, individual behavior interventions, and parent training.

...a new positive model that stresses personal competence and environmental integrity.

- E.G. Carr et al, 1991

Positive behavior is that set of skills that increases the likelihood of success and personal satisfaction for children and youth in academic, work, social, recreational, community, and family settings. *Support* includes both the educational methods for teaching and strengthening positive behavior and the systems change methods that provide opportunities to display it (Carr, et al, 2001).

THE CONTEXT FOR PBS

PBS applies a behaviorally-based systems approach to help schools, families, and communities design environments that improve the link between research-based practices and the environments where the teaching and learning of pro-social behavior occurs. PBS focuses on teaching as a central behavior change tool, replacing coercion with environmental redesign to achieve durable and meaningful change in the behavior of students (Sugai and Horner, et al, 2000).

The growing diversity of our student bodies, including greater behavior difficulties coupled with increased pressure on schools with limited resources to improve students’ academic achievement, creates a major and persistent challenge. For some time, schools have engaged in an array of practices and procedures designed to address behavioral challenges. When these practices are ineffective, schools drop them and move on to the latest fad. The problem is we have been unable to create the “contextual fit” between the problem behavior and the features of the environments where the problem behavior occurs (classroom, playground, home, neighborhood). The systemic

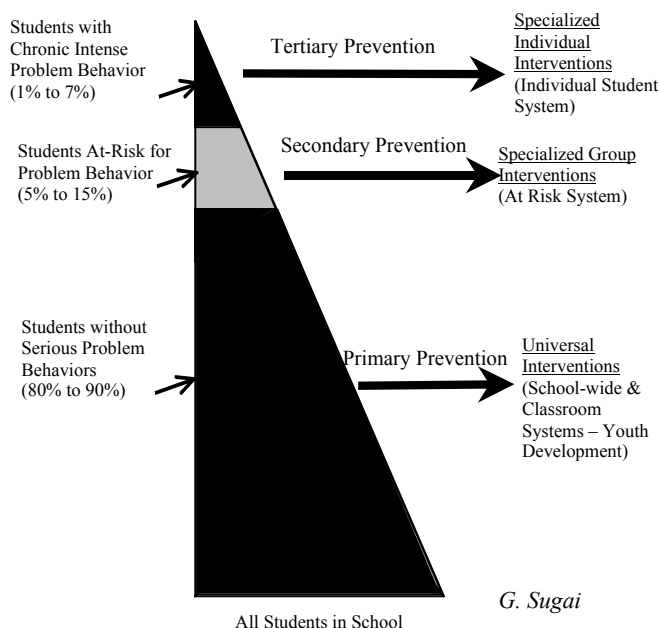
solution is to create “host environments” that support the use of effective evidence-based practices.

“The sexy part is the practices. The durable part is the system. We need to focus on the system to get enduring change.”

- R.H. Horner

A CONTINUUM OF POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT

A systems approach to PBS provides a continuum of team-based, proactive behavioral support at three levels: 1) primary prevention – (reduction of new cases of problem behavior); 2) secondary prevention – (reduction in the number of existing problem behaviors); 3) tertiary prevention – (reduction in complexity and intensity of current problem behaviors). PBS attends to the *policies* (e.g., discipline and procedural handbooks); structures (e.g. behavioral support teams); and routines (e.g., opportunities for students to learn appropriate behavior, staff development, data-based decision-making) that permit the adoption, implementation, and monitoring of evidence-based practices, creating a school culture of behavioral competence.



PBS procedures emphasize:

- assessment before intervention, whether the intervention is targeted at the system or an individual;

LEARN MORE ABOUT IT:

- **Web sites:**
 - OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) – <http://www.pbis.org>
 - Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice (CECP) – <http://www.cecp.org>
- **In this Handbook:** See additional briefs in this handbook on *Youth Development*, *School-Wide Discipline*, *Risk-Focused Intervention*, *Early Intervention*, *Wrap Around*, and *Discipline Provisions of IDEA*. For information beyond the scope of this handbook, see the Resources Section.

- changing environmental factors that contribute to and sustain problem behaviors;
- development of new personal and social skills that make engaging in the problem behavior irrelevant;
- redesign of the rewards and consequences that maintain behavior to foster the display of appropriate and effective social and behavioral skills; and
- the use of data collection and analysis to inform decision-making.

Educators should collect a variety of data (e.g., office discipline referrals, attendance and tardy records, academic progress) using a variety of methods (e.g., record reviews, interviews, observation) from a variety of sources (e.g., students, family members, school personnel, and community members). PBS provides guidance in the use of these measures to assess the effectiveness of the practices being implemented to ameliorate a particular problem situation.

PBS AND DISCIPLINE PROVISIONS OF IDEA '97

Amendments made in 1997 to the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act) require teams charged with the development of individualized education programs (IEPs) to conduct functional behavioral assessments and develop positive behavioral intervention plans and supports for students with disabilities whose behavior interferes with their own learning and that of others and/or may require disciplinary action. Although the provisions of the act do not define what is meant by “functional behavioral assessment” and “positive behavioral intervention plans,” the evidence-based practices of PBS address and appear to meet the intent of this law.

SUMMARY

PBS is an effective, evidence-based approach for schools to identify and organize their behavior policies, procedures, and practices. The PBS approach offers schools, families, and communities a process to address needed changes for systems as well as individuals. The process is based on an established body of applied behavioral research that attends to important quality of life results. It works from a systems perspective, and gives priority to research-based practices. Schools that engage in this work can approach the full spectrum of challenging student behaviors, and provide important learning opportunities to develop the personal and social skills of all students. A team in each area education agency in Iowa is trained to assist schools that wish to adopt Positive Behavioral Supports as an approach to their work with social, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral development.